DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 003 CE 055 047

TITLE Developing a Marketing Strategy for Adult and Continuing Education.
INSTITUTION Further Education Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO ISBN-1-85338-194-2
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Admission (School); Adult Education; *Adult Programs; *Continuing Education; Foreign Countries; *Marketing; Public Relations; School Catalogs; *School Community Relationship; *Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS *Great Britain

ABSTRACT

The project described in this report aimed to develop an effective and affordable educational marketing strategy in one local British continuing education provider, as a case study for adult and continuing education nationally. Methods employed were as follows: a marketing consultant visited education centers; business and community directories were created; a representative sample of existing students was surveyed; and focus groups with manual workers sought the workers' opinions on adult education. Among the findings and conclusions were the following: (1) using a variety of sites for adult education permits developing the individual "personality" of each center to attract different sectors of the community; (2) adults expect greater comfort and more attractive surroundings than do school children; (3) strategic planning is required to ensure maximum impact from promotional materials, relative to the time and resources available to develop them; (4) a system for monitoring the materials' impact should be developed; (5) establishing corporate identity raises the profile of an adult education center; (6) a continuing program of research and efforts to secure cooperation and/or sponsorships from local companies, newspapers, and publications should be carried out to inform product development; (7) existing courses might be "repositioned" so as to appeal more directly to new and existing markets; (8) staff should be made aware of their function and value within the context of public relations; (9) the success rate for re-enrolling existing students is likely to be greater than in attracting new students; (10) flexible scheduling is important; and (11) promotional materials should stress the benefits of enrollment. (CML)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED320003

DEVELOPING A MARKETING STRATEGY FOR ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Love

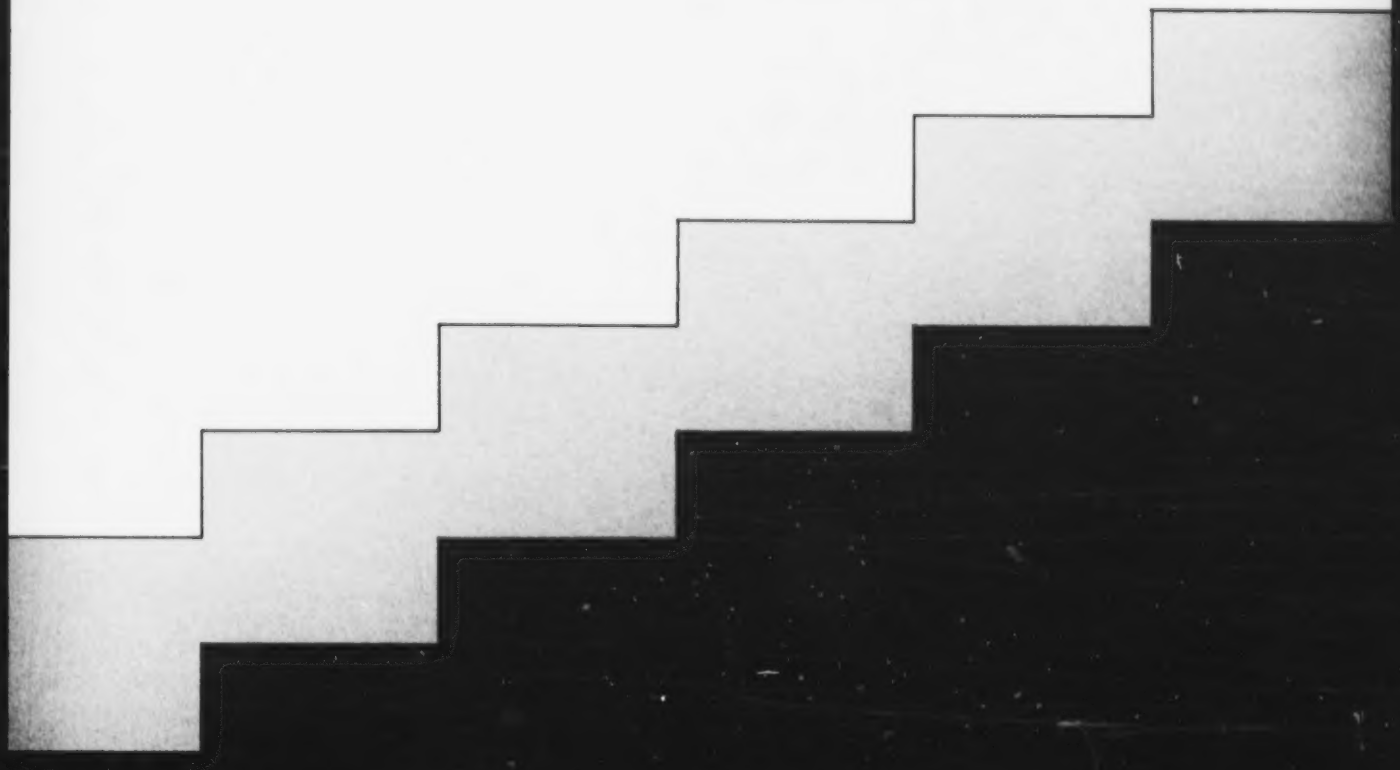
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 055 047

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FEU FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

DEVELOPING A MARKETING STRATEGY FOR ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION



ISBN 1 85338 194 2

© Further Education Unit (FEU) 1990

Reproduction in whole or in part of the contents of this publication is authorised for all non-commercial educational purposes, provided the source is acknowledged. Copies made for such purposes should not be recorded as part of any licensed copying scheme. All rights reserved with regard to commercial reproduction of the contents.

RP475

Printed in England by JEC Potter & Son Ltd, Stamford, Lincs.

CONTENTS

Preface		v
Summary points		vii
1.	Background	1
2.	Market research	3
3.	Applying the findings	7
4.	A marketing strategy	16
Postscript		23

This project offers good news for adult and continuing education providers. Standard marketing methods can be translated to meet their needs, and can do so by enhancing rather than detracting from educational priorities. A systematic marketing approach, from marketing audit through market research to the 'marketing mix', as part of an overall strategy, is an entirely feasible option for educational institutions.

Such an approach may require changes. It may require a reassessment of current practice, from decisions on course fee levels to the role of the prospectus, from the timing and duration of classes to their location, and from the value of designing and implementing programmes informed by the results of market research to the need to monitor the impact of promotional material. It may require a reassessment of relationships with the communities in which adult and continuing education operates. An important implied shift is away from simplistic concepts of 'community' to a more sophisticated understanding of the varied and distinct groups within it, that is towards the notion of market segmentation and target marketing.

In a sense this requires adult and continuing education to be both outward and inward looking, to appraise its own distinctive strengths and also to be sensitive to varied and changing external needs. This does not mean ignoring professional judgement acquired over many years. Market research, for instance, can indicate how people believe they feel and how they have behaved. It cannot accurately predict what people will believe and do in the future. Marketing, therefore, should add a new and important dimension to professional educational expertise; it cannot replace it.

It is important to stress that marketing is a feasible and affordable option. Significant resources and funding are not required to pursue a marketing approach. Indeed, adopting such an approach can help make more effective use of the limited time, resources and funding available, for instance by ensuring that a higher proportion of advertised classes are viable. Where marketing approaches are applied to increase enrolments, income and access to sources of funding, this can free time, resources and funding to help meet the needs of groups such as those with special learning needs or disabilities, the unemployed, manual workers, older learners and members of minority communities.

Adopting a marketing approach does have an initial time cost. It requires valuable time for thinking, discussion, planning, training, implementation and monitoring. However, this time is best seen as an investment which will save time in the long run by enabling resources (including time) to be used to the greatest effect.

Michael Baber
Alison Jennings
Kingston Adult and Continuing Education Service

SUMMARY POINTS

PRACTICAL AND AFFORDABLE

Adult and continuing education providers are becoming increasingly aware of the value of educational marketing. However, the very real constraints of time, resources and funding have often seemed insurmountable barriers to progress.

This project aimed to develop an effective and affordable educational marketing strategy in one local education authority, as a case study for adult and continuing education nationally. There was an emphasis throughout on piloting practical and inexpensive approaches to educational marketing, with a particular accent on market research.

METHODS

The project employed a half-time research assistant for one year and received an agreed number of days' help from a marketing consultant, a total cost of less than £10,000 for a local education authority with four full-time adult education centres, five evening centres and a range of outreach work.

This enabled the following research methods to be used:

- Observational research by the marketing consultant, who visited centres, sat in on classes and interviewed staff.
- Desk research to create business and community directories to help target research and publicity.
- A survey of a representative sample of existing students, with a view to increasing re-enrolments in adult education.
- Research carried out in 'focused' discussion groups in which manual workers expressed their views on adult education.

All these methods are available to other providers of adult and continuing education.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Place

- The variety of sites used for adult education offers both marketing challenges and opportunities, for example by developing the individual 'personality' of each centre to attract different sectors of the community.
- Adults expect greater comfort and more attractive surroundings in which to learn than do school-children. Improvements in furnishings and landscaping can be effected relatively cheaply.

Price

- Market research showed that views about fee levels varied but, generally, courses were considered to be good value.
- Flexible pricing policies should be investigated to achieve the optimum balance between income generation and eductional access.

Promotion

- A wide range of promotional material was in use but strategic planning is required to ensure maximum impact from the time and resources available.
- Detailed guidelines should be issued for staff involved in producing promotional material, and a system for monitoring the impact and effectiveness of different promotional methods should be developed.
- Establishing corporate identity raises the profile of an adult education service. Standard signs and letterheadings can be used.

Product

- There had been low public awareness of individual adult education subjects amongst many non-students.
- A continuing programme of research, seeking co-operation and/or sponsorship from local companies, newspapers and publications should be carried out, to inform 'product development'. This might involve the use of questionnaires and surveys.
- Existing courses might be 'repositioned' so as to appeal more directly to new and existing markets.
- Quality control is essential.

Public relations

- This is important, in attracting new students and supporting the case for resource allocation to adult education.
- All staff should be made aware of their function and value within the context of public relations.

Other issues

- Targeting existing students for re-enrolment and recruitment to new courses should not be ignored. The success rate in terms of recruitment is likely to be significantly greater than for those not yet involved in adult education.
- The timing of courses for adults needs to be flexible. Holiday patterns suggest that a four-term year might be worth considering.
- College and adult education centre prospectuses tend to be used mainly as reference guides. Their publicity value may be exaggerated.
- The potential catchment area for students should be carefully examined when considering the use of promotional and publicity materials.
- Promotional materials, particularly those targeted at traditional non-users of adult education such as manual workers, should stress the benefits of enrolment, including the end-product for each individual.

The need for colleges to adopt a marketing strategy in developing, delivering and promoting the services they offer is now widely accepted, and marketing officers are being appointed in increasing numbers.

The Further Education Unit (FEU) has observed and encouraged this process in a series of publications. In 1984, the Unit commissioned HR&H Marketing Research International Limited to undertake a review of marketing activities in further education colleges. The resulting report, *Marketing FE*, was published a year later. It advocated stronger support for marketing in colleges, including the development of overall strategies and the co-ordination, and systematic application, of formal procedures.

A subsequent study applied the methods used in the college survey to the field of adult and continuing education, and this was published as *Marketing Adult/Continuing Education*, in 1987.

A CASE STUDY FOR ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

This current report takes the main findings of that study and applies them, as a case study, in one local education authority, Kingston upon Thames. Although based in Kingston, the project aimed to develop an effective marketing strategy for adult and continuing education which would carry lessons *nationwide*.

In particular, the project sought to:

- develop an effective marketing strategy, showing the extent to which this goes beyond traditional notions of revamping publicity;
- investigate means to overcome the important constraints of time and resources (including finance) by drawing on a range of expertise, both in-house among existing staff, and external, through use of a commercial marketing consultant.

Intended outcomes of the project included:

- deployment of resources to support an increased marketing function;
- a cost-effective approach to market research and the setting up of an ongoing market research programme;
- a marketing staff development programme for academic and support staff;
- clarification of the feasibility of setting up a computerised student database;
- a marketing strategy based on relevant market research and a thorough marketing audit.

It was also hoped that the project would provide examples of practical collaboration with a commercial marketing consultant and with others in adult and continuing education and that it would produce quick results in terms of student enrolments and fee income.

Michael Baber, principal adult education officer with Kingston Adult and Continuing Education Service, directed the project.

Alison Jennings was research assistant and a Brighton marketing firm, IMC Direct Response Marketing Limited, was the commercial consultant. This report was edited and prepared for publication for FEU by Mike Duckenfield.

This is essential in identifying, and learning more about, potential needs in adult and continuing education. In this respect, the project had three phases.

FRAMEWORK

The first phase was desk research, examining and analysing already available information. Apart from its other benefits, this can save the necessity, temptation and not inconsiderable cost of carrying out original research. One aim in the project, for instance, had been to develop a target mailing list of opinion formers in the community. For this a directory of community groups and voluntary organisations was to be compiled. Research quickly revealed, however, that such a guide was already in preparation elsewhere.

The second phase involved a survey of existing students. The value of this rests on evidence from business that it costs several times as much to attract a new customer as it does to persuade an existing one to make a repeat purchase; enrolled students may be interested in joining other or succeeding courses. In addition, as those already on roll are easy to contact, survey costs can be minimised.

The third phase was research into non-users of adult and continuing education. Group discussions were led by a professional group moderator, so as to gain a better understanding of attitudes which act as barriers to participation.

USE OF A MARKETING CONSULTANT

Colleges and other education providers may not need help in carrying out research. Where help from a marketing consultant can be particularly valuable, however, is before and after such research. The consultant helped focus on what, precisely, needed to be researched, what techniques were most appropriate and how research questionnaires should be designed. The consultant was also able to help analyse and evaluate the research findings and advise on their application, and to contribute a professionally informed, and fresh, perspective on the marketing of the adult and continuing education service as a whole.

While the use of a commercial marketing consultant may lend the strength and expertise of external, professional authority to any marketing strategy subsequently developed (and this may assist in gaining additional resources), the option remains an expensive one. To ensure best value, the project team arranged maximum written briefing beforehand, so as to ensure that as much of the consultant's time as possible could be spent in an active role, and full-time staff were used to draft a marketing audit.

EMPLOYING A RESEARCH ASSISTANT

The decision to employ an assistant reflected the project's commitment to a research-based approach. It also ensured a continuing commitment to research throughout the project. With guidance from the project director, the research assistant was able to provide a means properly to plan, carry out, analyse, evaluate and disseminate research and its findings.

To keep costs to a minimum, a half-time post was advertised. The prospect of flexible hours, which could be combined with other work or family commitments, proved to be an attractive proposition, and the project had no difficulty in finding a suitable recruit.

PHASE ONE: DESK RESEARCH

The creation of community and business directories was seen as a means of providing reliable information on those organisations the adult and continuing education service wishes to target, both to help increase its responsiveness to community needs and to assist in its income-generating programme of short, training and updating ('PICKUP') courses.

The research assistant investigated the following sources of information:

- full-time adult and continuing education service staff, to establish existing contacts;
- directories available through public and academic libraries, including business directories such as British Telecom Business Pages;
- 'umbrella' organisations for local voluntary organisations, community groups and businesses, such as the chambers of commerce;
- local branches of national organisations — the Institute of Directors, for example;
- the planning department and careers service of the local authority;
- other education providers, including the local college of further education;
- the local press.

PHASE TWO: STUDENT SURVEY

National research and anecdotal information gained from staff had been supplemented by a usage and attitude survey carried out for the adult and continuing education service in Kingston, in 1986. The 1988 project survey was designed to clarify the student profile still further, to explore the effectiveness of different approaches to publicity and to investigate interest in potential areas of innovation within the established annual programme.

The survey adopted standard techniques.

- A questionnaire was drafted, with help from the marketing consultant, to ensure that the questions would be clear and relevant.
- To enable the survey to be conducted, analysed and correlated with minimal staffing, a self-completion form was chosen, with a high proportion of multi-choice questions.
- The draft questionnaire was piloted at one adult education centre and a number of amendments made.
- The revised questionnaire was distributed to a sample of students across the curriculum, attending classes for which

standard fees were charged (so excluding subsidised and externally funded courses, where a different student profile was anticipated).

- A sample of 10 per cent of students on standard fee courses was selected.
- Class tutors, who had been briefed, distributed questionnaires.
- Pre-paid envelopes were provided for the return of questionnaires and a deadline for reply given in a covering letter (completion in class would have produced a higher response rate but taken up valuable class time for which students had paid).
- To maximise returns, a follow-up note was sent to tutors asking them to remind students to return the questionnaire.
- The results were computer processed, using a program written by a member of staff (data entry required an average of two minutes per questionnaire).

Had the project timetable allowed, the optimum sequence would probably have been to draft and pilot the questionnaire in the autumn term, to carry out the main survey in the spring term and to use the findings to inform programming and publicity for the following academic year.

PHASE THREE: NON-USER RESEARCH

Previous research had shown that those under-represented in adult education, nationally and locally, included:

- young adults (aged 16-24);
- men of all ages;
- the very old;
- adults with disabilities;
- Black, Asian and other minorities;
- the unemployed;
- manual workers.

Given resource constraints, the project chose to concentrate on one significant group, manual workers. A qualitative research method (focus group discussions) was adopted here in order to probe deeply ingrained attitudes which would not be revealed by a survey. British Aerospace provided accommodation and agreed to allow time off work for some of its employees to take part. A group moderator was recruited from Surrey University.

A standard approach for 'focus group discussion' was adopted.

- Sessions were held on neutral ground — in this case the employer's rather than educational premises.
- Those taking part were told in advance of the purpose of the research and the fact that their individual contribution would be treated in confidence.
- The atmosphere and arrangements were informal, so as to put participants at their ease.

- Sessions were tape recorded.
- Discussions were facilitated, rather than led, to ensure an open-ended and exploratory approach.
- Visual material was used to stimulate discussion.
- A list of topics was used by the moderator to help focus the discussion on relevant issues without overtly imposing them.

3 APPLYING THE FINDINGS

This section summarises the main project findings and applies them to marketing. The format follows the project's three phases. The first, desk research and observation, divides into consideration of five of marketing's most important considerations — 'place', 'price', 'promotion', 'product' and 'public relations'.

FROM DESK RESEARCH AND OBSERVATION

Place

Each of the borough's adult education centres has a distinct personality, imposed by the physical characteristics of the buildings.

The Malden Centre is new, modern, airy and purpose-built. It has a swimming pool, sports facilities, cafe — and a substantial adult and continuing education programme. The King Charles Centre is very much a school building, with thoughtful interior decoration; the use of corridor walls for display dispelling what would otherwise be an impersonal atmosphere. The King Athelstan Centre consists of prefabricated units tucked off the main road. The North Kingston Centre, also in school buildings, benefits from surrounding gardens. The remaining centres utilise school premises on an evening-only basis. Their personality is very much influenced by their daytime use.

'Place' has an important impact on attitudes to, and awareness of, adult and continuing education opportunities within the community. Previous local research showed that only 30 per cent of users rated the level of comfort at Kingston's centres as 'good'. This compared with 80 per cent who rated the teaching as 'good'. Meetings during the project with centre managers prompted concern to be expressed about decoration and furniture.

Comment

The diversity of location and setting of the centres offers interesting marketing opportunities. The 'personality' of each centre could be emphasised, making them appeal individually to specific sectors of the community. 'King Athelstan' could concentrate on creating a homely atmosphere to attract those for whom school buildings have negative associations. 'North Kingston' could lend itself to 'study abroad programmes', summer sports and creative arts activities.

Moreover, external signage could be standardised, with signs reading 'Kingston Adult and Continuing Education Service. Welcome to the North Kingston Centre' etc. Forecourts and entrances could be improved by modest landscaping: tubs of evergreens and shrubs might be sponsored by local garden centres, and, as means allow, internal decoration and furnishings could also be improved.

Some changes could be effected without significant outlay. Individual good practice could be extended to all centres for

instance: signs in the centres could be standardised by use of stencils or Letraset; information boards could be placed in entrances, with photographs of the centre manager, caretaker and other key personnel, a map to show the location of toilets and other facilities (including a room guide), and news of available courses; more use could be made of walls and corridors for display; and classrooms could be made more informal in their layout. Also, some courses could be run off-centre, in work places, hotels or other venues.

Price

Student fee levels (1988/89) start at 95 pence an hour for conventional classes. There is a reduced fee of two-thirds of this rate for students receiving state pensions or income support, the unemployed, those under-18 and the registered disabled. There is a nominal fee for adult basic education and attendance on courses funded by the Training Agency or the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) is free. Companies are charged a full-cost fee for courses for their employees.

Students can enrol all year round, in person, by post or telephone, with Access and Visa payments accepted. This avoids long queues for enrolment evenings and gives some advance indication of class viability.

The 1986 research in Kingston suggested that 34.9 per cent of users think that their course fee is 'high' and only 1.5 per cent think it 'low' (63.6 per cent think it 'fair'). These averages vary across courses: a lower than average percentage of students on practical maintenance courses and a higher than average percentage on English as a Foreign Language courses think that their course fees are high, for example.

Comment

Research indicates the need for flexible pricing. With computerisation of enrolment, a reasonably sophisticated programme of price testing could commence, to ensure that customer satisfaction and sense of 'value for money' is maintained without unnecessarily limiting fee income or imposing financial barriers to access. Ideally, questionnaires should be used to establish which courses are considered to have a low fee, then course enrolments monitored against price increases. For some types of courses, particularly those which are business-related, enrolments could even be depressed by too low a course fee, price being perceived as reflecting quality.

Promotion

A variety of promotional material has been produced in Kingston. This includes newspaper advertisements, press releases, inserts in the local free newspaper, letters to the parents of primary school children, a prospectus, curriculum guides and a range of leaflets and brochures varying in format, sophistication

and professionalism. Use has also been made of a free slot on local radio. Kingston has not, on the other hand, tended to use posters or car stickers.

Overall, the emphasis has been on experimenting with approaches rather than agreeing and implementing a house style. Monitoring of the impact of promotional material has been sporadic, in part due to limited resources.

Comment

A review of existing promotional literature and activity suggested that action was required in the following areas:

- strategic planning of promotion to save time, money and resources;
- ensuring that response to all promotional activity is monitored to allow effective future planning and decision making;
- standardisation through guidelines for all staff producing promotional literature to ensure consistency of image and quality, thus maximising awareness of the borough adult and continuing education service as a whole, and establishing a corporate identity;
- analysis and research to establish the effectiveness of existing promotional activity and to determine alternative methods of distributing literature and of promoting the service.

The key word for any promotional activity is effectiveness. Time and money can be saved by printing basic leaflets in bulk, ready for overprinting specific course information when required (this also ensures consistency of image and standards). All advertisements and leaflets with a response mechanism should be coded to allow monitoring. Equally, all telephone responses should be logged and responses from exhibitions, open days and events tracked.

Product

Kingston describes the products it offers as 'courses'. The 1986 research suggests that awareness, except as regards 'O' level and 'A' level courses, is low amongst non-students.

Comment

Research is needed to monitor consumer needs for existing and new courses and to assess how repackaging existing courses might influence take-up. Research would cast light on 'courses' as the main product.

Public relations

Management of the adult and continuing education service in Kingston has begun to appreciate that public relations involves communication with a wide range of groups — students, current non-users, staff, suppliers and so on. As an example, annual reports to the local authority's education committee have reflected an understanding that councillors across the political spectrum need to be convinced of the value of investing in this area of education.

Comment

It is important that all public relations are influenced by management. Also, all staff should be made aware of their function and value within the context of public relations. For example, the effectiveness of a newspaper advertisement can be greatly reduced if those responding to telephone enquiries have not been fully briefed.

In addition to taking the implications of public relations into account in staff development programmes, printed literature may be useful. This could include developing the current staff handbook, to ensure that all staff understand the philosophy and objectives of the adult and continuing education service, are aware of the range of courses and facilities on offer, and of study and guidance services. A house newsletter provides a regular, frequent means to disseminate information to staff, and it may also encourage organisational identity and loyalty.

FROM THE STUDENT SURVEY

Source of information

How did students find out about Kingston adult and continuing education activities?

	per cent
Newspaper	32
Word of mouth	25
Library	23
Other, including leaflet	11
Can't recall	9

Newspaper advertising is expensive. Nonetheless, one-third of Kingston students found out about courses by this means. It is possible, however, that greater use of free editorial opportunities might achieve the same end. The strong showing of libraries underlines the importance of keeping them well supplied with appropriate information.

Solo, or with a friend?

Three-quarters (76 per cent) enrolled on their own; the rest signed up for courses with a friend or relative.

A possibility would be to examine an incentive scheme to encourage more existing students to bring along friends and relatives.

New subjects and approaches

Interest in the following was expressed.

	per cent
Classes with visits	22
Alternative medicine	20
Interior design	18
Classes for women	14
Career development	9
Consumer advice	7
Others (various)	10

Such a list provides useful pointers but expressions of interest do not always translate into actual attendance; offering classes on a pilot basis may be a safer starting point. Where new areas of interest are indicated, early advertising for appropriate tutors will be needed. The success of alternative medicine in one centre, where it was being piloted, suggests that it is worth extending to other centres.

Alternative class times

The following were most frequently mentioned.

	per cent
Weekend day school	32
Regular weekend school	11
Summer school	23
Regular summer course	45

Again, there is no guarantee that interest will lead to actual attendance. A small programme of weekend day schools is already available in Kingston. Responses suggest a modest expansion may be worthwhile, and piloting a regular programme at one centre throughout the summer certainly seems worth considering. Research and advertising among existing students in the spring term could help the prospects of success.

Value for money

The survey sought to draw several comparisons. Are courses better value than a television licence? Sixty-three per cent said 'yes'. Against visiting the cinema for the evening the figure was 70 per cent (65 per cent for the theatre and 63 per cent for a visit to a stately home). Seventy-one per cent thought Kingston's courses were better value than correspondence courses.

Such information is useful publicity material. It also suggests that adult education may be undervaluing its worth and underpricing courses.

Taking holidays

Thirty-two per cent of students took their main holiday in August, 18 per cent in September and 16 per cent in July. The figures for May and June were eight and nine per cent, respectively.

The fact that less than 50 per cent take their main holiday in July and August suggests that there may be a market for a regular summer programme, perhaps concentrated on one centre as a pilot. The fact that one in six take their holidays in September underlines the importance of a late start to the autumn term.

Age of students

	per cent
16-24	9
25-34	20
34-44	23
45-54	18
55-64	13
65 and over	15

Adult education appeals to a wide age spectrum, although there is a noticeable tailing off among the over-40s.

Residence

Seventy per cent of students lived in the borough of Kingston.

The fact that 30 per cent do not has obvious implications for course publicity.

Likelihood of re-enrolment

Just over two-thirds of students said that they would re-enrol.

Research to find out more about the other one-third might help in modifying provision, although many of the sample indicated that their reason for not re-enrolling was that they were leaving the area.

The prospectus

Most students had seen the course prospectus and most had a clear idea in advance of the subject that they were interested in. Many students wanted more information on the content and objectives of individual courses as well as on the level of ability

or previous experience required. Research showed that the prospectus was used mainly for reference, regarding times, locations and enrolment procedures: it was informational rather than promotional.

Previous experience of adult education

Forty per cent of students had previous experience of an Adult Education Institute, 15 per cent an FE college and 5 per cent the Open University. Eight per cent had taken a correspondence course. However, 42 per cent had no previous experience of adult education.

This indicates that Adult Education is a major route for adults seeking educational opportunities — including a high proportion for whom it is their first educational experience since leaving full-time education.

FROM THE NON-USER RESEARCH

The discussion groups involving manual workers who were not current participants in adult and continuing education provided some useful insights to the expectations of this group. The following are accompanied by comment from the project director.

Education should lead to something, preferably that which is vocationally relevant.

The various beneficial end products of attendance on courses should be identified and used in advertising and marketing. There should be a strong focus on vocationally relevant studies in publicity aimed at working class communities (in particular at men) and that carried out through employers.

Course fees were seen as cheap but paying the whole fee in advance was regarded as 'signing a blank cheque'.

Experimentation with payment by instalments and 'pay as you go' has proved reasonably popular with students but is administratively time-consuming and expensive. Fees could be increased to cover administrative costs or more time could be spent illustrating what classes involve, for instance, with information about tutors, students and courses, so as to reduce qualms about the nature and content of courses.

There was little accurate knowledge of adult education, what it involves, or how to find out about it.

Obviously, current publicity is not having the desired effect. More research should be carried out on alternatives.

Age was seen as a barrier. Middle-aged and older people feared that they had got out of the habit of learning and would not be able to keep up with younger learners.

Endorsements by older students of the benefits of courses could be featured in publicity material.

The appearance and associations of educational buildings coloured perceptions. Some people assumed that adult education classes held in junior schools would be taught by junior school teachers. College venues were preferred as it was assumed that teaching would be by college lecturers.

The appearance and comfort of premises should be improved and stressed in literature, so as to create adult learning environments distinct from school, especially where classes are held in 'school' buildings. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the one centre purpose built as an adult education, leisure and community centre is the one where enrolments are rising most rapidly.

There are strong but inaccurate images of teaching styles and relationships. Adult education was seen as 'going back to school'; 'night school' was a powerful and enduring image.

An interesting experiment, in line with 'positioning theory' used in marketing, would be to build on, rather than seeking to challenge, these ingrained views.

Tutors were seen as, and expected to be, experts.

Giving prominence to tutors, their experience and expertise, in advertising would be a useful step. Ensuring all tutors are of high quality is an essential quality assurance point.

A higher proportion travel by public transport.

Bus and train routes should be featured in publicity material. Programmes likely to be popular with manual workers should be at centres that are accessible by public transport. Advertising might be carried on buses.

Having to go home after work and then come back to classes was seen as a disincentive.

After-work classes could be piloted, particularly if refreshments are available. This could be either on company premises or at centres close to major employers. In urban areas, these classes could be run as an alternative to rush hour travel for office and factory workers.

Keeping up with children is a possible motivator, for instance in relation to computing.

This will give ideas for programming but remember that research may be needed into school approaches to teaching for maximum compatibility. During holiday periods and evenings, parent and child courses might be offered.

Overall, the groups interviewed had a definite impression of what adult education is about — it just happened to be an inaccurate one. Adult education is linked with night school at many levels — physical setting (school or college), time of courses (night time), purpose of courses (qualifications), age of participants (younger people) and teaching method (formal classroom approach).

The barriers that this image of adult education presents to this sector of the community are enormous and can be generalised as 'self esteem and confidence' issues. Overcoming these barriers requires a phased programme of long-term marketing action.

4. A MARKETING STRATEGY

This outline strategy was proposed by the marketing consultant employed for the project.

OBJECTIVES

1. To incorporate research results into a marketing strategy
2. To make maximum use of existing resources
3. To increase fee income in a cost-effective way
4. To increase retention of existing customers
5. To raise awareness in selected non-user groups.

STRATEGY

PLACE

The 'place' element has an important impact on attitudes to, and awareness of, the adult and continuing education service amongst all its publics. Previous research showed that only 30 per cent of users rated the level of comfort at the centres they attended as 'good'. The qualitative research undertaken with manual workers highlighted the many barriers associated with the use of school buildings.

The practicalities associated with addressing 'place' issues should be fully assessed by the management team and a strategy agreed.

Strategic decisions

1. Analysis and discussion regarding the practicalities of developing each site's 'personality' to be followed by management decisions on which strategy should be adopted.
2. Any available budgets to be used in line with this adopted strategy.
3. Course location to be brought into line with the strategy, wherever possible.
4. Feasibility of siting any courses developed specifically for manual workers at the Malden Centre to be investigated. Alternatively, or also, investigate work places as venues for lunch time or courses run immediately after work hours.

Practical measures

- Continue active pursuit of budgets to upgrade furniture, furnishings and decoration at all centres, where necessary from non-local authority sources.
- Use internal budgets to implement standardisation of external signage.
- Investigate local sponsorship of external floral/foliage displays.
- Implement programme to standardise internal signage, information boards and similar.
- Encourage tutors to provide appropriate materials for wall and corridor displays and to consider creative use of available seating and furniture arrangements.

- Using computers, begin monitoring the impact of the varying use of different centres against the implementation of any 'place' element of the marketing strategy.

PRICE

Existing research suggests there is considerable scope for adopting more flexible pricing structures without adversely affecting customers' sense of 'value for money'.

Again, the practicalities must be assessed by the management team to ensure that the administrative overheads do not outweigh potential increases in fee income.

- Continue flexible pricing strategy wherever practical.
- On computerisation, commence programme of price testing.
- Investigate feasibility of 'staged payments' or 'pay as you go' for appropriate courses.

PROMOTION

Promotional activity is an important tool in any marketing strategy. However, the level of investment in time, money and resources must be fully justifiable, that is promotional activity should be demonstrably effective. To achieve this, it is vital that a 'continuous loop' of planning promotional activity and monitoring response to this activity is implemented.

Planning promotional activity is necessary to not only ensure that all activity is working towards defined objectives but also to identify the most cost-effective uses of available time, money and resources. Without an ongoing programme of monitoring response to promotional activity, the management team will not be able to make decisions on future planning and cost effective strategies.

Staff development

Develop guidelines for staff involved in producing promotional material, covering basics of copy and design, use of logos, typefaces and checklists of information to be included (course tutor, benefits of enrolling on course, course content, location, action required, phone number, reply device, contact name, reply by date). Guidelines should also cover resources available, regarding production and distribution and the monitoring of responses. Continue the provision of staff training in promotional techniques and marketing using local authority in-service funding schemes.

Monitoring response

- Set up a system for central collation of response rates and cost-effectiveness of promotional activity, for example a standard form to be completed as part of any promotional activity. This could include the following captions:
  - objective
  - media used
  - number produced
  - distribution method

— response

— cost (re. time, materials, production, distribution)

— cost per enquiry/enrolment.

- Produce standat \ telephone response sheet to allow easy collation of response figures.
- On computerisation, produce and distribute report summarising all monitoring activity.

Economics of time and bulk production

- Investigate feasibility of producing base leaflets, posters and flyers in bulk, ready for over-printing or photocopying specific course or event information.
- Analyse requirements for leaflets and promotional literature and produce plan or schedule to allow all economics of typesetting, printing and distribution costs.
- Investigate feasibility of producing base artwork for press advertisements, ready for specific course or event information to be 'dropped in'.

Prospectus

- Fully investigate function of prospectus.
- Undertake costs/benefits analysis for alternative prospectus formats.
- Analyse implications for alternative prospectus formats, regarding increasing available information such as course content and requirements.

Programme to retain existing customers

Examine all practical methods of encouraging existing customers to enrol on their next course before their current course ends.

The whole process of selecting and enrolling on the next course could be made into a more social event; existing customers could be informed by their course tutors at the end of a course of the dates of 'open days and evenings' at which information about other courses would be available, with the opportunity to meet course tutors. Existing customers could be reminded of open day dates and the availability of courses (locations and fees) through information at centres, libraries and in the local media.

Programme to attract new customers

1. Given the 26 per cent of existing customers who came to their first course with a friend and the 25 per cent who first found out about the adult education service through a friend, thought should be given to any ways available to facilitate this process.

- Posters could be displayed in all centre corridors with the message: 'Are you enjoying your course? — Then tell your friends!'.
- A flyer and/or promotional leaflet could be distributed by course tutors, encouraging existing customers to talk to their friends about adult education and asking them to bring a friend along to classes. Leaflets could be prepared for students to give to their friends.

2. Prioritise new customers on a costs/benefits basis and target selected groups for specific, carefully monitored programmes of promotional activity. For example:

- Manual workers — 28 per cent of Kingston's adult population fall into this category (i.e. 28,000 adults).
- Assume that one per cent of the target market could have its awareness raised and interest in adult education stimulated by means of promotional activity (i.e. 280 people).
- Assume that 10 per cent of this one per cent could be converted into users (i.e. 28 people).
- Average fee/term of £23, with 28 recruits, provides income of £644.
- Agree costings (including subsidised or common elements) and allocate an appropriate sum for promotional activities.

A programme of activity could include foyer distribution of leaflets at workplaces, press releases in company newsheets, posters on the shop floor, exhibitions and displays, opportunities to meet course tutors, counselling and workplace enrolment.

3. Co-ordinate press publicity, concentrating on 'human interest' stories and news of particular relevance to non-user and potential new customer groups. For example:

- Feature on how the adult education service has helped local small business.
- Highlight particular students, for example pensioners, the over-45s.
- Provide regular stories about new course opportunities.
- Give summaries of research with groups of employees.
- Publicise 'success' stories.
- Write up stories about course trips and any courses jointly developed with local employers.

Maximising the effectiveness of promotional activity

1. All promotional activity must work towards overcoming known barriers. The research with manual workers highlights many factors which probably operate to a greater or lesser extent amongst non-users; many will not have an 'appropriate' image of adult education, will not realise what it can offer nor know how to find out about courses.

Promotional literature ***should not:***

- Feature 'Kingston Adult and Continuing Education Service' as the most visible typographical element.
- List or cover 'traditional' courses first.
- Be produced in formats and styles that only the informed reader can make ready use of.
- Feature only course information.
- Be written in the third person.

Promotional literature ***should:***

- Always feature benefits, not just course titles.
- Give as much information about course content, ability required and outcomes as possible.
- Provide contact names, sources of additional information, fees and enrolment procedures, in an easily accessible format.
- Be produced with the target audience in mind, including awareness of the barriers associated with any particular audience.
- Be designed to achieve specified marketing objectives.

2. Having ensured that promotional literature features appropriate messages and information conveys an appropriate image, it is then necessary to ensure that it is made available to the right people at the right time.

Distribution issues include costs/benefits analysis of the following methods:

- Direct mail (probably most suitable for communicating with local companies).
- 'Take-ones' ('grab' leaflets for use in workplaces, banks, building societies, Jobcentres, church halls, community association premises, department stores and public buildings).
- Inserting leaflets/flyers into publications (chamber of commerce publications or mailing, local business magazines, local newspapers, church and community magazines etc.).
- Having information desks at sites with high traffic volumes (for example, Malden Centre, department stores, shopping centres, libraries etc.).

In all cases, timing should be considered:

- Direct mail to the business community should be timed to arrive at the beginning of the week and not on a Friday when recipients are least likely to respond.
- Any promotional literature offering a telephone response should be received at the beginning of the week to allow recipients to respond immediately and not have to wait over a weekend (note that local free newspapers tend to be delivered on Thursdays or Fridays).
- The most popular month for holidays is August — any distribution method will be least effective then.
- 'Follow-ups' are often effective, promoting action amongst recipients for whom the timing of the first communication was inconvenient.

3. Media editorial coverage (press, radio, TV) should be a high priority. It is perceived as more credible than advertising.

PRODUCT

Kingston Adult Education Service positions the products it offers largely as 'courses'. For at least the short term, this approach,

together with a monitored assessment of response to new or re-packaged courses, would be advisable.

In the longer term, research is required to establish if it is necessary, desirable or feasible to re-position concepts of product, that is positioning courses only as a route to other end products.

New products

As already noted, some system of monitoring interest in new subjects and course formats and concepts is strongly recommended.

Subject to practical considerations, the following could be considered:

- Simple 'suggestion boxes' placed in all centres.
- Encouraging tutors to discuss new course options with existing users.
- Distributing short questionnaires to a population sample of existing customers.
- Mailing specialist markets (for example, small business, local industry personnel managers) with short questionnaires.
- Seeking co-operation and/or sponsorship from local companies, newspapers and other organisations, to run relevant questionnaires and surveys.

Questionnaires should offer a FREEPOST return address or appropriate collection boxes and, if possible, be given incentive by means of a free prize draw. Editorial comment would increase the perceived value of the survey as well as giving the editor an opportunity to demonstrate support for a service designed to meet the needs of the local community, that is the newspaper's readership. This venture could also be a valuable joint exercise for all local adult and continuing education providers.

Repackaging existing products

There is scope for repackaging existing courses both to broaden appeal within existing user groups and to attract existing non-user groups.

This approach can take advantage of 'fashion' and trends, particularly:

- Lifestyle issues, for example the increasing interest in home environment (opportunities regarding: picture presentation and framing, floristry, quilting and patchwork, soft furnishings, upholstery), 'healthy living' (opportunities regarding: physical activities, stress management, alternative medicine, cookery).
- 'Green' issues (opportunities regarding: organic gardening, wildlife and countryside concerns, herbs in health and beauty).
- Management training issues (opportunities regarding: stress, communicating with people, assertiveness training, information technology, psychology in everyday life).

Quality control

Quality obviously plays an important role in the continued success of any product and can have significant impact at a public relations level.

The investigation of the feasibility of introducing a routine quality control system, with performance indicators, is strongly recommended. At a minimum, this should include:

- Distribution of course assessment sheets by course tutors, with collection by means of specific points at each centre.
- Some monitoring and counselling of course tutors.
- 'Suggestion boxes' at each centre.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

All marketing activity can be positioned in a public relations context and it is important that all strategies are linked into communicating an appropriate message to all the potential customers of Kingston Adult and Continuing Education Service.

Staff

1. Enthusiasm, commitment, loyalty and professionalism are qualities which all support a successful public relations operation.
2. Managers need to have an adequate and appropriate level of administrative support if public relations strategies are to be implemented successfully.
3. Production of a staff handbook, a staff training programme and a staff newsletter should be continued and developed further.
4. Quality control programmes and media coverage will positively influence staff at a public relations level.

Existing customers

1. Satisfied customers fulfil an important public relations function.
2. Loyalty to, and involvement with, the adult education service will be encouraged by quality control programmes, media coverage and opportunities to introduce friends.

Non-users

Attitudes to, and opinions of, the adult education service will be influenced by the following:

1. Any contact with staff or customers.
2. External 'place' elements.
3. All promotional activity of which they become aware.

Many educational institutions have given priority to publicity, seeing only one aspect of the marketing process. This project has sought to reverse the process and to adopt a systematic and research-led approach to marketing.

Briefly the process has included the following steps:

1. The service management team carried out a marketing audit to help inform the direction of the research project. This enabled the service to identify its major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as viewed from a marketing perspective.

2. The service actively sought to deploy resources to support an increased marketing function. Success in gaining external funding, from the Further Education Unit, the former Manpower Services Commission's Central Reserve Fund and its successor, the Training Agency's Mutual Development Fund, was matched by local authority investment in a development plan, designed to enhance the service's cost-effectiveness. As a result, the service was able to develop its own marketing and development unit, staffed by a full-time marketing and development officer, a half-time publicity officer, a part-time research assistant and a part-time clerical assistant.

3. Lessons learnt from the project, particularly in relation to market research techniques, will enable future market research to be undertaken effectively within a limited budget. The service is also improving its capacity to apply market research findings so as to help produce a successful marketing strategy.

4. With help from the Local Education Authority Training Grant Scheme (LEATGS) and the willingness of guest speakers to contribute expertise from both educational and commercial marketing, a programme of marketing staff development is now well under way. This was introduced for management team members, now includes part-time tutors, and will be extended to support staff in the near future. The programme has included a 24-hour residential conference on quality assurance.

5. The collation of both community and business directories is proving invaluable to the marketing and development unit when seeking to target research or promotion in these areas.

6. Establishing a student database is now part of a wider computerisation strategy for the service designed to provide:

- An airline-style instant confirmed booking system enabling students to enrol on any course within the Authority at each centre.
- The establishment of management information system databases on students, staff, courses and financial performance.
- Ancillary services such as word processing and electronic mail.

Again, this forms part of a long-term development plan aimed at improving responsiveness and cost-effectiveness.

7. Research has played an important part in overcoming constraints of resources and funding, whether by identifying and

clarifying need or identifying suitable sources of funding. This approach has helped the service negotiate over £200,000 of external funding during the lifetime of the project, together with education committee support for a development plan.

8. Research undertaken before the project enabled an interim marketing strategy to be developed, giving particular emphasis to curriculum development designed to increase access to educational opportunities, access to employment and access to enterprise.

9. A collaborative approach to marketing sought active involvement with a marketing consultant, with service staff and with other adult and continuing education providers in the area. Collaborative staff and curriculum development resulted from this approach, although constraints of time did limit progress.

10. The tangible benefits of adopting a systematic marketing approach are being clearly demonstrated with each passing term: student hours of attendance have risen by 32 per cent in the last two years, producing a significant increase in fee income. A healthy increase in external funding has already been noted, and evidence of a shift in perceptions of the service at local authority level has also been noted.

FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

Board of Management

Chairman

Allan Ainsworth, Personnel Manager, John Player Group

Members

Mr J Baker, Confederation of British Industry
Mr G A Brinsdon, Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr M Cross, Royal Society of Arts
Business and Technician Education Council
City and Guilds of London Institute
Mr G Kendall, The Training Agency
Mr D G Libby, Department of Education and Science
Mr L J Rees, Welsh Joint Education Committee
Mr G M Rowarth, Association of Principals of Colleges
Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education
Ms C Sherriff, Trades Union Congress
Mr B D Short, Her Majesty's Inspectorate
Mr A F Warren, National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
Mrs J Wisker, Association of County Councils

Observers

Dr F D Duffin, Department of Education, Northern Ireland
Mrs J Hall, National Curriculum Council
Mr J Howgego, Scottish Education Department
Mr R L James HMI, Welsh Office Education Department
Professor P Thompson, National Council for Vocational Qualifications

Secretary

Geoff Stanton, Chief Officer, Further Education Unit

Objectives

The objects for which the **Further Education Unit (FEU)** is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;
b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;
c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;
d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

Address

2 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE Telephone: 071-321 0433
Facsimile: 071-321 0528